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29 March 1963

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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DAILY BRIEF

*Cuba: Jet aircraft from Cuba on 28 March buzzed a US-flag freighter off the north coast of Cuba, firing a short burst astern and a longer burst of about 30 rounds across the bow while circling the ship six times. The ship was not hit.

The incident took place between 1755 and 1805 EST, about 20 nautical miles north of Cayo Frances, where Cuban exile commandos had attacked the Soviet freighter Baku less than 48 hours earlier. The American ship was the Motor Vessel Floridian, 4,600 tons, with a crew of 30, on a regular general cargo run from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Miami. The Floridian, built in 1960, is operated by Containerships, Inc., of New York, with Wilmington, Delaware, as home port.

Fidel Castro had informed the Swiss Ambassador to Havana during the afternoon that a ship flying a US flag had been spotted in the general area where the incident later occurred, and that he was sending a patrol boat to determine the freighter's nationality. When the Swiss Ambassador subsequently telephoned Castro Washington's announcement of the attack and the ship's identity, Castro replied that the incident had been "a big mistake," that the aircraft had had no instructions to open fire, and that the Cuban Government was prepared to issue the necessary explanations if the US Government wished to file a protest.

The master of the Floridian described the aircraft involved in the incident as single-engined swept-wing

jets, with high swept tail, painted dark green with a circular insignia of lighter color between cockpit and tail. (This describes Cuban Air Force markings.) One aircraft remained high, but the plane which fired approached at no more than 200 feet above the water. Some rounds hit the water less than 200 yards ahead of the ship. The Floridian has motion pictures and still photography of the incident.

US Navy aircraft reached the Floridian at about 1835 EST and reported all quiet. The ship is due in Miami this morning. (Location of the incident was about 50 statute miles northeast of Remedios)

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Cuba-USSR: Fidel Castro is [redacted]
[redacted] planning a three-day trip to Moscow during the May Day celebrations.

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[redacted]
It had been previously rumored in Moscow that Castro was to have visited there this month but that the trip was postponed to late April or early May. Castro is said still to harbor strong resentment against the Soviet Union over last fall's missile withdrawal, but to recognize the necessity of not jeopardizing continued Soviet assistance.

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USSR--Armed Forces: The replacement of Marshal Zakharov, chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, by Marshal S. S. Biryuzov, former commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, probably is the result of serious conflicts within the military and party leadership.

A Red Star article on 20 February made the unusually harsh statement that "only the party . . . is able to cope with the defense of our fatherland and with military affairs in general." It also said that the party, with Khrushchev at the head, firmly foils "all attempts to reduce the importance of party guidance over our armed forces" and that "only the party" can prevent war.

These references strongly imply that elements of the military have been attempting to assert too great a role in the formulation of national policies. Likely areas of conflict include allocation of funds for the military, military strategy, and perhaps the military's role in the Cuban venture. Thus, Zakharov's removal may be followed by additional changes in the high command.

Biryuzov, who has been a strong supporter of Khrushchev's emphasis on strategic weapons, probably was appointed to quell opposition by the military to party decisions. His experience as Rocket Forces commander may also indicate that the party intends to place greater emphasis on strategic weapons at the expense of theater forces. Biryuzov's successor is not yet known.

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USSR--Leadership: Rumors of impending changes in the top Soviet leadership are becoming increasingly widespread in Moscow.

Several Soviet sources allege that Khrushchev's leadership of the party or the government will soon be passed to Kozlov or Kosygin. Such rumors probably reflect a growing sense of unease among Muscovites that current policy difficulties could result in a shake-up in the Kremlin. There have been clear signs of regime difficulty in reaching decisions on a number of foreign and domestic issues, including the Sino-Soviet dispute, allocation of economic resources, East-West relations, and cultural policies.

According to the US Embassy, the "almost open awareness" of this extraordinary state in Soviet policy and its expression in speculation about changes at the top is a new phenomenon in Moscow. Foreign observers in the Soviet capital cannot remember a time when so many rumors concerning the status of high-ranking personalities have coincided and persisted so long without effective official counteraction. The Soviet public may regard the removal of Soviet Staff Chief Zakharov as another sign of differences within the hierarchy.

The willingness of several top leaders to leave Moscow at this time casts some doubt on the accuracy of those rumors concerning specific changes at the highest level. Khrushchev, accompanied by party secretary Demichev, left Moscow on 14 March for one of his periodic "working vacations" in the south. Mikoyan has not been identified in Moscow since 27 February and may also be on vacation. Kosygin was last seen in the capital on 12 March, and Kozlov--the second-in-command in the party--is currently touring Central Asia.

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USSR--Nuclear Test Ban: A Soviet official has stated that the "compromise" on-site inspection proposal drafted by the eight nonaligned powers at the Geneva disarmament conference cannot be accepted.

This proposal, not yet formally tabled, calls for 31 to 35 on-site inspections over a period of seven years. Usachev, a senior member of the Soviet delegation, told a US official that the USSR opposes this proposal on the grounds that the US would use a large number of inspections during the first year and then "dump" the treaty.

The draft proposal does not specify a maximum number of inspections during any given year. It calls for agreement on this issue through negotiations by the nuclear powers. Usachev reaffirmed that the USSR "cannot move" from its offer of three inspections a year for "political" reasons.

The Soviets have probably conveyed their objections to the nonaligned representatives.

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Argentina: Army officials, who have ultimate power in the present political turmoil, are urging political leaders to get together on new election plans which could neutralize Peronist voting power.

The army prefers that the Peronists be defeated at the polls, rather than suppressed by force. This, however, requires the formation of an effective political front, which the army contends is blocked by the failure of political party leaders to abandon their selfish interests. The Peronists have been a major factor in the political turmoil because of their refusal to foreswear allegiance to Peron and their threats of revolution if not given power.

General Staff officers told the US army attaché on 26 March that the parties want the armed forces to bear the onus of controlling Peronism and are confident that the armed forces will ultimately take steps to do so.

The army hopes that President Guido's 27 March plea for unity to avoid chaos will pressure the non-Peronist parties into a coalition. If this fails, Guido will offer to resign, according to these officers.

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NOTES

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[Redacted]

Bolivia: The US Embassy in La Paz reports that Czech representatives have been meeting "day and night" with high Bolivian officials on Prague's offer to build an antimony smelter near the mining center of Oruro. President Victor Paz Estenssoro assured the US ambassador a year ago that he would not agree to a Czech antimony proposal during his term of office. However, Paz may now be forced to agree by public opinion and his need for a showpiece project.

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Israel-Syria: Seasonal activities along the Israeli-Syrian border have increased possibilities for a flareup of greater than usual trouble there. In the sensitive demilitarized zone southeast of Lake Tiberias, the Israelis are planting trees despite unresolved differences over the location of a demarcation line, and Syrian troops have already fired at them. On the lake itself, Israeli fishing in areas near Syrian territory has reopened the controversy over Israeli and Syrian rights on the eastern half of the lake.

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